

## Book Review

By Dr. John Byl

<http://bylogos.blogspot.ca/2013/02/refuting-figurative-genesis.html>

### Review:

*In Six Days God Created: Refuting the Framework and Figurative Views of the Days of Creation* by Paulin Bedard (Xulon Press: USA, 2013, 252 pages). Available here and here.

Did God really create everything in six days? Nowadays, many Reformed theologians question this, teaching that the creation days should be taken figuratively. Genesis 1 is said to tell us nothing about the length or sequence of the creation days. A figurative approach to Genesis conveniently avoids conflict with the supposed billions-of-years history taught by mainstream astronomy and geology.

But is this a viable option for Christians?

That is the question this book addresses. The author, Rev. Paulin Bedard, is the pastor of the Reformed Church of Quebec in Saint-Georges, Quebec. The central focus of his book is the Framework Interpretation, which takes Genesis 1 to be a literary structure with a mainly theological message. Other, closely related, figurative interpretations are also examined. For simplicity, I shall lump these all together under the general term the Figurative View.

### Overview

The book is divided into three roughly equal parts. The first part defends the traditional view—the plain, literal interpretation—of Genesis. Proponents of the Figurative View contend that a literal reading of Genesis 1-2 leads to various contradictions and problems. For example, it is claimed that the chronological order in which plants, animals and man are created in Genesis 1 conflicts with Genesis 2. Rev. Bedard considers a number of these objections. He finds that a closer study of the text shows that all the alleged difficulties can easily be resolved within the traditional approach.

Thus, there is no need to postulate figurative days.

The second part discusses the weaknesses of the Figurative View. One problem is that a number of possible literary structures have been proposed. But none of these gives a good fit with the actual text. On the contrary, they seem more to be superimposed onto the text. In fact, the most obvious pattern is the simple “six days plus one” (Ex.20:8-11) of the traditional view.

Further, even if Genesis 1 were to display a highly stylized literary form, why should that rule out its historical accuracy? This is a false dilemma, because Genesis could be both well-written and factually correct.

Promoters of the Figurative View argue that the intent of the author of Genesis is not to tell us how God created. Rather, its supposed intent is to tell us merely that God made everything, and that we should serve God rather than idols. But how can we know the author's intent unless he tells us? A good Reformed hermeneutical principle is that the Bible should interpret itself. Only the Bible itself can clarify its actual intent. It is thus noteworthy that Genesis presents itself as historical, not poetic. Moreover, elsewhere in the Bible, whenever Genesis is referred to, it is always taken to be literally true.

Thus, the Figurative View raises more problems than it solves.

The third part of the book highlights the dangers of the Figurative View. First, the Figurative View attacks in an insidious manner what God has clearly revealed. It persistently raises doubts about what God actually said or did during the creation week. It rejects, not only the historical reality of the days, but also the historical reality of a number of events described on these days.

Further, it questions the clarity of Scripture. The Figurative View reinterprets a clear and simple passage of Scripture in a very complex and abstract manner. This entails that the Bible can no longer be understood by normal people, who must now rely on elite theologians.

Rev. Bedard contends that the driving force behind the Figurative View is the desire to accommodate the Bible to modern secular science. Christian scholars do not want to be thought of as “anti-intellectual”. However, this involves adopting a hermeneutic that makes modern scientific theory a guideline for interpreting the Bible. Once adopted, the new hermeneutic is a corrosive acid that eventually erodes all Biblical authority. Bedard gives examples of several adherents of the Figurative View, such as Reformed theologians Timothy Keller and Bruce Waltke, who have gone on to embrace theistic evolution. Others, such as Howard van Till, have gone so far as to completely reject the Reformed faith and belief in a personal God.

Thus, the Figurative View is a very dangerous error.

Finally, Rev. Bedard urges Christians to be discerning, to reject this false interpretation, and to remain faithful to His Word. We must not be ashamed to boldly confront secular science with what God has revealed in Genesis about His creative acts. Even if that may incur a loss of “academic respectability”.

### **Evaluation**

This is a timely book. The matter of origins is presently a hot topic in many Reformed churches, also in the United Reformed Church and the Canadian Reformed Church.

Regretfully, the Framework Interpretation is taught by a number of URC ministers and theologians, particularly those associated with Westminster Seminary (California). Although the CanRC, in its unity talks with the URC, expressed some mild official concern regarding the URC's toleration of the Framework Interpretation, the CanRC does not seem to consider this a barrier to unity.

Even in the URC and CanRC, the discussion has moved beyond the creation days. Questions are now being raised about whether God created by means of evolution, whether Adam had animal ancestors, whether Adam and Eve were the only humans alive when they fell, whether all humans today stem from Adam, etc. This in turn raises theological questions about original sin, redemption, and Biblical inspiration, authority and interpretation.

Clearly, much is at stake. It is therefore crucial that our churches heed Rev. Bedard's advice and take a solid stand on Biblical truth--starting with Genesis 1.

In sum, Rev. Bédard has written an excellent refutation of figurative views of Genesis 1. He shows the necessity of maintaining the plain truth of God's Word, in face of current attacks on its credibility. It is very readable.

I heartily recommend this book, particularly for Reformed (and other) students, pastors and theologians.